

Stakeholder Interview Summary

Michigan Department of Transportation State Long Range Transportation Plan 2005 - 2030



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The Michigan Department
of Transportation**

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Executive Summary

To kick-off participation for the MDOT State Long Range Transportation Plan (MI Transportation Plan), Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates interviewed forty-two key stakeholders between January 24, 2006 and February 15, 2006. This critical first step was the initial effort at public outreach.

The number of stakeholder interviews conducted was not intended to be all-inclusive. It was a qualitative data-gathering tool used at the outset of the planning process to get a sense of what issues and concerns may be raised when reaching out to the broader public.

Respondents were very thoughtful in their discussion of the goals and concerns they had for transportation in Michigan. These discussions provided the project team with a snapshot of common stakeholder issues and concerns. Some of the key issues identified through the 15 questions included: the need for a more balanced transit system; better linkage between land use and transportation; and the desire to address system preservation, maintenance, asset management, congestion and safety. All issues and concerns heard during the interview process will be reviewed and considered in the technical work for this plan.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates conducted stakeholder interviews with forty-two key stakeholders between January 24, 2006 and February 15, 2006.

The purpose of the interviews was to:

- Establish conceptual and organizational continuity between the Summit and the MI Transportation Plan;
- Provide a snapshot view of the public and stakeholder issues to be addressed in the participation process;
- Ensure that the MI Transportation Plan and its Participation Plan reflect how the public wants to participate and what they will need to provide informed input that will be so important in the progress of the technical work;
- Identify additional individual stakeholders and organizations to be included in the MI Transportation Plan process.

The number of stakeholder interviews conducted was not intended to be all-inclusive. It is a qualitative data-gathering tool used at the outset of the planning process to get a sense of what issues and concerns may be raised when reaching out to the broader public.

Stakeholder groups engaged in this process include, but are not limited to the following:

- Regional planning agencies



- Councils of government
- Chambers of commerce
- Social service agencies
- Environmental groups
- Business owners
- State agencies
- Road building/pavement groups
- Transit organizations
- Airport organizations
- Trade unions

There were several styles in which these interviews were conducted, including in-person one-on-one interviews, in person group interviews, and individual phone interviews. The interview style selected was determined by several factors including the location of the stakeholder and their schedule availability.

Interview questions were developed to gather information on what types of improvements stakeholders would like to see made to the existing transportation system, how they would like to see the work of the Transportation Summit and related activities brought forward and what type of recommendations they would like to see in the MI Transportation Plan.

The following section provides a summary, by question, reflecting common statements.

Chapter 2. Stakeholder Interview Question Summaries

2.1 Stakeholder Interview Question 1

Do you know what a long range transportation plan is? Are you familiar with the existing 2000-2025 State Long Range Transportation Plan?

All of the stakeholders we interviewed with the exception of one knew what a long range transportation plan was and were familiar with the long range planning process. The one person who did not know what a long range transportation plan was had just started her job.

The majority of interviewees were familiar with the 2000-2025 Plan. Most stated that they know where to find the document but do not use it very often. A few interviewees use the existing plan as a reference when writing grants or working with MDOT.

2.2 Stakeholder Interview Question 2

Were you or your organization involved in the Transportation Summit or related activities? If yes, what was your involvement?

Over half of the people we interviewed attended one or more Transportation Summit or Summit-related activity.



Twenty of the people we interviewed participated on various Summit Action Teams. Representatives from each of the nine Summit Action Teams were interviewed.

2.3 Stakeholder Interview Question 3

How do you feel the ongoing work of the Transportation Summit and related action teams should be carried forward into the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan?

Interviewees felt the Transportation Summit should be brought forward into the MI Transportation Plan through existing reports and materials developed by Action Teams. It was noted by several participants that materials and reports need to be reviewed and approved before they are carried forward. A lot of good work was done as part of this process but some of the reports and materials produced may not represent the views of all.

It was also felt that participation activities and the work of the Consciousness-Raising & Public Involvement Action Team should also be used in the development of the MI Transportation Plan. Most felt the Transportation Summit was a great process that considered all modes and really engaged people on a new level.

2.4 Stakeholder Interview Question 4

What overall improvements do you think should be made to Michigan's transportation systems?

Suggested public transportation improvements

- The public needs to be better educated about transit and how to use it.
- Transit needs to be better integrated into the transportation system.
- There needs to be a more balanced investment in transit.
- Public transit needs to be expanded throughout the State.
- There needs to be more funding options for transit.
- Additional support is needed for Amtrak and light rail.
- Need to fix existing funding structure for transit.

Suggested roadway network improvements

- Better quality preservation and maintenance of roadways is needed.
- Asset management needs to be a priority.
- Improve safety and congestion.
- "Fix it First" program needs to be continued.
- Add roadway capacity but only where needed.
- Expand roadway network to meet economic development needs.



Suggested cargo and port area improvements

- Need to continue to study the movement of freight.
- Freight needs to be better incorporated into the transportation system.

Suggested bicycle and pedestrian facility improvements

- Need to coordinate with local and regional agencies to establish a regional or state trail network.
- Improve safety and increase facilities and public access.
- Facilities need to be cleaned and maintained.
- Continue to look for ways to integrate trails and facilities into the planning of roads and streets.

Suggested airport improvements

- Airports need to be better tied into cargo and port areas.
- Need to improve and expand modal options for getting to and from airports.
- Communication between state airports and local airports needs to be improved.
- Modernize existing local and state airports.

Suggested ferry service improvements

- Look at establishing ferry service on the Detroit River.

Other suggested improvements

- Improve participation process.
- Continue to support regions and MPO's. Make sure they are properly staffed, and funded.
- Continue to support and implement asset management program.
- Communication between the public and MDOT regarding road closures and road work needs to be improved.

2.5 Stakeholder Interview Question 5

What are the strengths and weaknesses of Michigan's existing transportation system?

Strengths

Strengths were very focused on the roadway network. Interviewees felt the biggest strengths of Michigan's existing transportation system were the coverage of the existing roadway network, the connectivity of roadways and the preservation and maintenance of the roadways.

Interviewees from the Upper Peninsula praised the new passing lanes on their roadways. They felt they were a significant strength and would like to see the funding program continued.



Weaknesses

Weaknesses varied greatly. The most commonly heard weakness was the current state of the transit systems. Many felt the existing transit systems were in poor shape with not enough service, limited service areas and no interconnectivity with other modes.

Funding was also seen as a major weakness. It was felt there is inadequate funding available to maintain and preserve the existing transit systems. Many people were concerned that the needs of the systems are only going to continue to grow as we move toward 2030. It was suggested that other alternative funding sources be investigated by MDOT. It was noted by several interviewees that if funding was not increased soon to continue to maintain and up keep our roadways our current strengths such as the maintenance and preservation of roadways and the connectivity of the roadways could become our weaknesses.

Interviewees from the Upper Peninsula felt that air service was inadequate and too costly. They wanted to see the number of flights and the connections between airports increased.

2.6 Stakeholder Interview Question 6

What transportation-related issues will most significantly impact Michigan over the next 25 years?

Provide interviewee with examples:

- Congestion on major highways
- Sprawl
- Air quality
- Maintenance of existing roads
- Mode choice
- Other

Interviewees felt that the maintenance of existing roads would have the biggest impact on the State of Michigan over the next twenty-five years. People felt the existing road network is comprehensive and has good interconnections. Interviewees were very vocal about the fact that the road network needs to be maintained and preserved. A lot of time and money has gone into building and improving these roadways and they want to make certain it is continued. MDOT's "Fix it first" program needs to move forward.

It was also felt that congestion on major highways will significantly impact Michigan over the next twenty-five years especially on major interstates.

Below are the top four answers heard from interviewees:

1. Maintenance of existing roads (25 Stakeholders)
2. Congestion on major highways (16 Stakeholders)



3. Sprawl (14 Stakeholders)
4. Mode choice (10 Stakeholders)

2.7 Stakeholder Interview Question 7

Which of the following should receive the highest priority to best serve your community:

- Maintain/preserve the existing transportation system
- Build new roads
- Improve public transit
- Safety
- Security
- Intercity rail passenger
- Aviation
- Other

Interviewees provided a number of suggestions for what should receive the highest priority to best serve their communities. Below is a list of the top five answers we heard during the interviews.

1. Maintain and preserve the existing transportation system (28 Stakeholders)
2. Improve public transit (24 Stakeholders)
3. Safety (15 Stakeholders)
4. Intercity passenger rail (14 Stakeholders)
5. Build new roads increase capacity (12 Stakeholders)

Aviation, border crossings, funding and asset management were also listed as priorities by interviewees.

2.8 Stakeholder Interview Question 8

Is the quality of transportation better/worse than five years ago?

More than half of the people we interviewed felt that the quality of transportation was better than it was five years ago. The other half of the interviewees were split between the roads are the same and the roads have gotten worse over the last five years.

It was noted by a number of interviewees that although overall the transportation system had improved over the last five years, transit was still lagging behind. They felt in some areas there was no sufficient mass transit service or other alternative methods of transportation.

Most felt that the condition of the roadways had improved due to the amount of money that had been invested in roadway projects. It was felt that now that all this money had been spent on roadway projects, these roadways need to be preserved and maintained.

It was stated by one interviewee that “everyone is putting more cars on the roadway and they are still in better shape than five years ago”.

2.9 Stakeholder Interview Question 9

What are your/your organization’s expectations of the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan?

The majority of interviewees want to see a plan that won’t just sit on the shelf for ten years. They are looking for a plan that incorporates MPO Long Range Transportation Plans, the Statewide Strategic Safety Plan, techniques from the Contact Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process and other related transportation documents. Other specific recommendations from interviewees include the following:

- More policy direction should be provided in the MI Transportation Plan.
- Would like to see MDOT increase emphasis on research and development. They should look at the implications of using new technologies to solve problems.
- The MI Transportation Plan should examine and recommend new sources for funding.
- Priority corridors need to be identified in the MI Transportation Plan.
- An inclusive participation process should be used.
- The MI Transportation Plan should present a broad view of transportation issues and reflect where Michigan wants to be in the future.
- Transportation choices must be emphasized.
- It should be a truly multi-modal plan that identifies needs for all systems.
- Would like to see work of the CSS program carried forward.

2.10 Stakeholder Interview Question 10

What specific recommendations should be part of the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan?

- Increased funding needs to be provided for local and regional transportation projects.
- Explore public/private and other alternative funding opportunities.
- “Fix it first” philosophy should be continued.
- There should be a continued emphasis on multimodalism and connectivity.
- Improve and expand the transit system.
- Continuous maintenance and preservation is needed.

- A better connection between land use and transportation planning is needed.
- Priority corridors should be included in the MI Transportation Plan.

2.11 Stakeholder Interview Question 11

What are some of the transportation needs of minority, low income and/or underserved populations today, and how will they change by 2030?

Interviewees felt that the transportation needs of minority, low income and/or underserved populations will only continue to increase as we move towards the year 2030. Below are some of the commonly heard recommendations and comments.

- Provide more mobility for people in urban areas.
- Offer transportation options other than driving.
- Better access to schools and employment is needed.
- Transit hours and services need to be expanded.
- Increased funding is needed.
- Create more walkable, higher density communities.
- Low cost transit is needed in high density areas.
- Cars and gas just keep getting more expensive making the situation worse.
- The number of non-English speakers is growing and needs to be reflected in transit materials and advertising.
- Increased transit service to the suburbs is needed.
- Need to provide transit options that serve rural areas and older populations.

2.12 Stakeholder Interview Question 12

How do you feel the demands of an increasing older population will impact the state's transit system over the next twenty-five years?

Interviewees felt the demand of an increasing older population would have a significant impact on the State's transit system over the next twenty five years. Many felt these impacts would become the problems of the general public. Below are some of the comments interviewees had:

- Transit service in rural areas will need to be increased and improved.
- Transit service will need to be improved and better coordinated.
- We need to educate people about transit and how to use the systems.
- Improved signage, lighting and other roadway and design improvements will need to be implemented.



- The State should promote and support elderly living in more dense urban areas.
- There needs to be increased transit service available to medical facilities and hospitals.
- Transit service between urban and rural areas and county to county service needs to be increased and improved.

It was also noted that it is a major life change to give up your license. This decision has a significant impact on a person's quality of life and something has to be done to make people feel good about it.

A few interviewees felt that there should be a mechanism for taking away a person's drivers license once they are no longer able to drive safely.

2.13 Stakeholder Interview Question 13

How should Michigan make better use of technology in transportation?

Provide interviewee with examples:

- **Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)**
- **Internet/Web sites**
- **Other**

Interviewees felt that MDOT should bring ITS to the next level. It was felt that ITS was being used but not to its fullest potential. There are a number of ITS projects in urban areas but it needs to be brought into suburbs and rural areas. People want to see advanced warning systems to notify drivers of accidents and weather problems. It was also noted that MDOT should make better use of the variable message signs to improve congestion. At the present time they are rarely used.

Other suggestions for making better use of technology include the following:

- GPS to improve transit service.
- HOV lanes to maximize the value of the highway system.
- Promote the use of Smart Cars (cars equipped with advanced safety and navigation equipment).
- Research and employ new striping and pavement technologies.
- Toll roads to raise more revenue.
- Establish a strategic plan for the implementation of research and technology.
- Develop an improved modeling system.
- Continue to establish research programs with industry and university representatives.

A few interviewees felt that the MDOT Web site needed to be improved. People noted having difficulty finding materials and felt the site needed to be more intuitive. It was suggested that road conditions be available online so people can log-on to see them before they leave the house in the morning.

2.14 Stakeholder Interview Question 14

An important part of this plan is getting input from the public. How would you prefer to receive information about the 2030 State Long Range Transportation Plan?

Provide interviewee with examples:

- **Factsheets/brochures**
- **Newspaper articles**
- **Activity/community centers**
- **MDOT transportation service centers**
- **Public meetings**
- **Web site/E-mail**
- **Other**

Participants had a lot of feedback as to how they like to receive project information and participate in the MI Transportation planning process. Below are the top six suggestions we heard from interviewees followed by some other ideas.

1. Web site/E-mail
2. Newspaper Article
3. Stakeholder Meetings and Outreach
4. Public Meetings
5. Factsheets/Brochures/Newsletters
6. MDOT Transportation Service Center Outreach

Other ideas

- Web casts
- Billboards
- Legislative outreach and activities
- Cable
- Special outreach to those who can't read
- Serve food

It was noted by several people we interviewed from the Upper Peninsula that E-mail and Web site outreach was not a very effective method of outreach for that area. Many people do not have Internet access. They felt public meetings and getting on the agendas of other organizations to make presentations were better methods of outreach for the Upper Peninsula and other rural areas.

Several interviewees suggested using a combination of different outreach techniques to make certain we reach as many people as possible.

2.15 Stakeholder Interview Question 15

What groups or people are critical to be engaged in this planning process? How should we engage them? What tools should we use?

Below is a list of the critical groups to be engaged in the planning process provided by interviewees. Please see Question 14 for information on how interviewees felt organizations should be engaged and what tools should be used.

- AAA
- AARP
- Academia
- Airports - regional and local
- Automotive industry representatives
- Battle Creek Bicycle Club
- Bicycle advocates
- Copper County Scenic Byway Committee
- Counties
- County Road Commissions
- Detroit Working for the Environment
- Disability network
- Economic and private developers
- Flint Area Pastors Association
- Freight rail providers
- Governor's Council on Physical Fitness
- High school student government leaders
- Hispanic groups/publications: El Zocolo news, Nueva Opinion
- Historical societies
- Independent Living Centers
- Industry representatives
- Insurance agencies
- Keweenaw Community Foundation
- Keweenaw Land Trust Foundation
- Legislators
- Lions clubs

- Local and school health departments
- Michigan Association of Counties
- Michigan Association of Rail Passengers
- Michigan Association of Timberland
- Michigan conservation clubs
- Michigan Environmental Council
- Michigan Gamaliel Institute affiliates (faith-based activist groups)
- Michigan Land Use Institute
- Michigan Municipal League
- Michigan Nurses Association
- Michigan Road Builders Association
- Michigan Suburbs Alliance
- Michigan townships
- Michigan Transportation Research Board
- Monroe County Planning Commission
- MPOs /Regional Planning Agencies
- NAACP in Detroit
- National Park Service
- Native American groups
- Northeast Michigan Community Service Agency - Alpena
- Private ferry operators
- Realtors associations
- Religious organizations
- Safe community groups
- School transportation providers
- SMART (Southwestern Michigan Alliance for Recreational Trails)
- State and local police, fire departments, hospitals
- Tourism groups
- Traffic Safety Committees
- Tri-City Cyclists
- Trucking industry
- Upper Peninsula Recreation and Travel
- UPS and FedEx
- Western Michigan Disability
- Western Michigan Environmental Action Council

Chapter 3. Conclusion

The stakeholder interviews provided the Project Team with a snapshot of current transportation issues and concerns. Information gleaned from these interviews will provide focus and guidance as the technical work begins. Below is a list of the key points captured from the stakeholder interviews:



- Expand network to support economic development
- Strengthen public participation process
- High priority to addressing system preservation, maintenance, asset management, congestion, safety
- More balanced transit investment, more education, more funding options
- Add capacity only where needed
- Incorporate freight needs into the system
- Establish regional / state trail network
- Better choices in accessing airports
- Intercity passenger rail is important
- Emphasize multimodalism and connectivity
- Better linkage between land use and transportation
- Reports and materials from the Transportation Summit process should be reviewed and considered for use in the development of MI Transportation Plan

Stakeholders expressed that they would like to receive information about the project and communicate with project staff through the project Web site and E-mail. Additional outreach methods will have to be implemented in the Upper Peninsula where many residents and businesses do not have access to the Internet. It was suggested that mailings and additional outreach meetings be coordinated for these areas.

The interviews provided the project team with insights regarding appropriate communication methods for gaining a full understanding of the public vision for transportation in Michigan. This process also provided a diverse comprehensive list of stakeholders and organizations to include in project outreach and on the project contact list. All stakeholders will be included on our project mailing list and will receive updates about upcoming participation activities.